DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 899 FL 801 247

AUTHOR	Weinstein, Gail
TITLE	Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Communities. ERIC Q & A.
INSTITUTION	National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, DC.; Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-06-00
NOTE	6p.
CONTRACT	RR93002010
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Community Programs; Cultural Pluralism; Curriculum Design; *Educational Needs; Educational Policy; *Educational Trends; *Family Literacy; Family Programs; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); Instructional Materials; *Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy Education; Program Design; Public Policy; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

A discussion of family and intergenerational programs promoting literacy reviews selected research, current policies, goals, models for program design, and curriculum approaches. Research informing both family and intergenerational literacy programs includes early research on literacy in school-age children and more recently, studies of literacy practices within social and political contexts. Legislative and policy initiatives and privately-sponsored programs have influenced and continue to affect family literacy work. Goals of family and intergenerational programs vary, including: improving school achievement; improving skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors surrounding reading; developing advocacy for schooling; and re-connecting generations in positive ways. Several basic program models are in use, each designed to address the characteristics of participants. Both heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings are used. Curricula and materials used are influenced largely by program goals. Promising trends in family and intergenerational literacy include collaboration between parents and schools to promote more effective programs, efforts to strengthen families and communities, planning and instruction beginning with inquiry into learners' lives, targeting of learner-defined needs, encouragement of intergenerational sharing of knowledge; and fostering of learning among communities among both learners and practitioners. (Contains 34 references.) (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 421 899

ERIC Q & A

June 1998

National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Communities

by Gail Weinstein
San Francisco University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 026474

ERIC Q & A

June 1998

National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education

Family and Intergenerational Literacy in Multilingual Communities

by Gail Weinstein
San Francisco University

The terms intergenerational literacy and family literacy have been used to describe how literacy is valued and used in the lives of children and adults. They have also been used to describe educational programs designed to strengthen literacy resources by involving at least two generations. While there are many differences in definitions and approaches, a key notion that most family and intergenerational literacy studies and programs share is a recognition that the relationships between children and adults are important and that these relationships affect literacy use and development.

This Q&A reviews selected research, current policies, goals, models for program design, and curriculum approaches in intergenerational literacy work. It concludes with a discussion of promising practices in family literacy efforts.

What research has informed family and intergenerational literacy work?

The initial thrust for many family and intergenerational programs drew on research in emergent literacy that showed that parents' skills and practices influence the school achievement of their children (e.g. Sticht & McDonald, 1989; Teale 1982). These studies examined early home experiences and suggested that they had a profound effect on development of cognitive skills. The notion of parent as first teacher grew from this body of research and influenced the growth of programs that focused on early childhood development.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a new genre of literacy studies emerged that views literacy practices from within the social and political context in which they occur (Street & Street, 1991). Ethnographers, researchers who seek to understand and document how others make sense of the world, argued that it was crucial to examine the functions and uses of literacy within a given community. Their studies highlighted differences in home and school practices, and in styles of interacting through oral and written language (Gadsden, 1992; Taylor, 1997).

In this period, interest grew in exploring how families for whom English is not the native language use languages and literacies. Studies of language use among Mexican Americans (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987), Navajos (McGlaughlin, 1992), Cambodians (Hornberger, 1996), and the Hmong (Weinstein, 1990/1997) for example, illustrate how language and literacy use reflect values, beliefs, and views of the world that are culturally patterned and may or may not be shared by school teachers and others. Ethnographic research makes it possible to document these differences and explore their consequences. As immigrant children gain access to English more quickly than their parents, this approach also makes it possible to look at the role of language and literacy in changing intergenerational relationships (Weinstein-Shr, 1995).

What are the policy initiatives that affect family literacy work?

The term family literacy has gained recognition through the growth of private and public initiatives such as the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation, Toyota Families for Learning, Head Start, and Even Start, all of which draw on the language and concepts of emergent literacy research. The programs' primary purposes have been to focus on early childhood development, and to support parents in promoting the school achievement of their children.

Legislative priorities of the time may influence programs in ways that have little relation to educational research. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, for example, (also known as welfare reform), places enormous pressure on families to get off welfare and find jobs. These pressures may influence the content of family literacy classes as employment training becomes a focus of the adult education component (National Center for Family Literacy, 1997). In order to maintain funding, programs often must adapt to the current political realities which are reflected in funding priorities.

Equipped for the Future is a national adult literacy initiative to develop standards through a broad-based grassroots consensus-building process (Stein, 1997). The standards focus on the knowledge and skills adults need in their roles as workers, community members, and family members, as defined by adult learners, practitioners, and other stakeholders across the country. This approach to developing standards is consistent with the assumptions behind ethnographic research. The family member role map is one that will be a useful guide for future family literacy work.

What are the goals of family and intergenerational programs?

One set of goals for family and intergenerational programming has been improving the school achievement of children by promoting parental involvement. Programs aimed primarily at increasing parental involvement use activities that encourage or teach parents 1) to provide a home environment that supports children's learning needs; 2) to volunteer in the schools as aides or other roles; 3) to monitor children's progress and communicate with school personnel; and 4) to tutor children at home to reinforce work done in school (Simich-Dudgeon, 1986).

It has been argued that school-focused programs should enable schools to better respond to parents and families. With this as a goal, parents learn about school, but school personnel also learn about families, enabling schools to better respond to the realities of the communities they serve (McCaleb, 1994).

A second set of goals often found in family literacy programs is to improve skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors linked to reading (Nickse, 1990). Models that operate with these goals often produce a variety of reading activities. Some of these may involve teaching parents to imitate behaviors that occur in the homes of successful readers such as reading aloud to children and asking them specific types of questions as they read. Parents of young children may practice reading in adult groups using books that they may then read to their children. However, experience has shown that non-native English-speaking parents rarely know more English than their children, and thus are not comfortable reading to them. Fortunately, research indicates that there is a benefit to reading in any language (Cummins, 1981; 1996). Further, there is equal benefit to children when they read aloud to their parents (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison 1982). Innovative programs may employ a variety of ways to foster a love of literature. In one program in Pajaro Valley, California, Latino adults study Spanish children's literature to help them prepare to read to their children (Ada, 1988). In others, like the Family and Child Education (FACE) program, Native Americans may take advantage of elders' storytelling skills as the basis for creating their own native language texts (Department of the Interior, 1997).

Another goal for some programs is to enable adults to develop a critical understanding of schooling to "evaluate and rehearse appropriate responses and develop networks for individual or group advocacy" (Auerbach, 1992, p. 35). Models for family and intergenerational literacy that address themselves to this goal are constituted by activities that address family and community concerns and that attend to the role of home language and culture.

Finally, some programs aim specifically to reconnect the generations in positive ways. In addition to the stresses of voluntary or involuntary resettlement, multilingual families may find that their difficulties are exacerbated by the differences among generations in the pace of language acquisition. Children who have more exposure to English are often placed in a position of translating and solving other problems for parents, reversing traditional roles and creating additional stresses for all involved. Children and adults are resources for one another. In one family literacy class, for example, participants are creating a family web page in which adults provide the material that children enter onto the computer and illustrate (Hovanesian, in press). Projects like these draw on the resources of children for English and computer facility, while tapping the memories, knowledge, and stories of adults. In this way, literacy is advanced while generations are connected.

What are some models for family literacy program design?

The goals of the program will determine the program design. The design takes into account the characteristics of the participants targetted as well as appropriate activities for working with these learners.

In the Kenan model, on which the federally funded Even Start is based, pre-school children and adults participate in homogeneous age groups as well as in intergenerational family groups. There are four components: 1) adult education and ESL in which curricula vary from program to program; 2) parenting discussions or classes with a frequent focus on early childhood development; 3) classes for young children; and 4) activities for parents and children together (Brizius & Foster, 1993). These components are developed and implemented through collaborative efforts of child and adult educators.

Other models may begin with any one generation and reach out to others. Child educators may reach out to families and communities through children. A teacher, for example, sends journals home so that children bring material about their families and their communities into the classroom (Doorn, 1995). Parents, may participate in discussions, and language-development activities focus specifically on family issues (McGrail, 1995). Family issues may be the focus of workplace instruction (Nelson, 1998). Elders, too, are an untapped resource for supporting family literacy (Weinstein-Shr, 1993) and providing access for children to "community funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992, p. 20). In one project, Chinese elders are documenting their memories of Chinese festivals by creating a video as well as a book of poetry and recipes for the youth of the community (Hartman, in press). Children, adults, and elders all benefit from developing their own language resources as they connect with one another through literacy.

What kinds of curricula and materials are used in family literacy programs?

Curricula and materials are largely influenced by program goals. Programs that aim primarily at increased parental involvement in schooling often draw on competency-based curricula for adults. This approach emerged in the late 1970s in a shift away from grammar-based curriculum when newly arriving refugees needed English for immediate application in their new lives (Peyton & Crandall, 1995). For family literacy, content might include specific lessons on the school system and its personnel, study skills, reading report cards, talking to teachers in parent-teacher conferences, or helping with homework. (Bercovitz & Porter, 1995). School-focused programs may also include information about health and nutrition or American notions about parenting skills, for example.

Another approach, also aimed primarily at adults, is the notion of participatory curriculum in which the students themselves determine the direction and, thus, the content of their classes. Problem-posing, a technique addressing community issues collaboratively, assumes that teachers are facilitators who do not themselves have answers, but can help to identify resources for solutions that students themselves determine. School issues may or may not be a primary focus of programs where learners themselves identify issues that they wish to explore. The primary goal of participatory education is social transformation through critical reflection and collective action.

Some have argued that these approaches do not have to be in contradiction. There are many programs in which learners critically discuss their own situations as they master the competencies of their choice (Weinstein-Shr & Huizenga, 1996). In classrooms where learner needs are articulated, specific competencies may or may not be of interest to learners, and collective action for change may or may not be the appropriate response to specific learner goals. Therefore, the approach to curriculum design should reflect learner goals.

Another orientation, one that may integrate the previous two, is that of project-based work. With this orientation, learners develop language and literacy skills while they pursue specific non-linguistic goals. For example, Mien women describe photographs from *National Geographic*, creating books about life in Laos for their children (Agard, in press). Producing books, videos, websites, quilts, murals, or other products creates the context for developing and using a wide range of literacy skills while passing knowledge from one generation to another. Planning and executing actions or

events are another type. For example, learners may study the language of a ballot initiative (e.g. Proposition 187) and collectively write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. Pot luck events or celebrations, intergenerational skits, fund-raising sales, and protest marches all are examples of events that have been planned and enacted by learners within the context of family literacy programs.

What are some promising directions for the future?

One promising trend in family literacy work is that, in effective school-based programs, the task is seen as a reciprocal one of enabling parents to understand and negotiate with schools while providing the means for school personnel to understand the concerns of parents for who English is not a native language. Instead of assigning blame for problems, collaborative solutions are sought.

A second promising trend is the growing recognition that there is more to family and intergenerational literacy than children's school achievement. When the goal is to strengthen families and communities, the literacy resources of elders come into focus, creating many ways of connecting children and adults. Effective efforts are likely to be as diverse as the communities they serve. However, there are certain characteristics that repeatedly arise in promising programs:

1. *Planning and instruction begin with inquiry into learners' lives.*

Families who have resettled in the United States, whether voluntarily or by forced migration, have had to be extremely resourceful. If refugees had lacked survival strategies, they would not have made it here! Voluntary migrants, too, must mobilize both financial and social resources to manage the enormous transition to another country. It is helpful for program planners to learn about the linguistic and educational resources of any given group, as well as the kind of kinship or social networks that community members use to solve problems. Local leaders, particularly those who are members of immigrant communities, can be an especially valuable source of information in planning programs and designing curricula that take into account learners' resources and needs.

Children and adults can investigate their own language use. During the course of instruction, learners can be invited to document their current practices, while exploring the resources they wish to add to their repertoire.

2. *The program addresses needs that learners themselves define.*

When asked what was most difficult about raising children in America, several Southeast Asian women answer that their children no longer like their cooking. Concerns that may seem trivial are often codes, or concrete representations of larger, more serious concerns, like losing authority over older children. A program focusing only on early childhood development issues, for example, may miss the clues that parents are most concerned about their relationships with their pre-teens and the imminent dangers of gangs or drugs.

Asking, watching, and listening are essential to learning about the realities of learners' lives. Learner writing, language experience stories, and interviews (collected in English or translated from the native language) are all potential sources of information about the family. Adult learners themselves can provide direction in planning and developing curricula and classroom instruction. In some programs, learners participate directly in classroom and program decisions (e.g. Literacy South in Durham, NC) When learners' needs drive programs, participants' attendance generally rises. In these programs, learners are able to demonstrate success inside the classroom and beyond as they define it in ways that teachers, administrators, and funders can understand (Holt, 1993).

3. *The program encourages generations to share knowledge and experience.*

Children who understand their own background and culture are more likely to have the self-esteem to learn a second language and culture. Adults whose knowledge and wisdom is valued can support their children in school and elsewhere, and can be helped by their children without having their dignity or their parental role threatened. Programs that support oral history and explore native language and culture strengthen families and communities while teaching them about the new culture.

While adults may have life experience and wisdom, children often have more access to the new language and to new technologies. In the family web project (Hovanesian, in press), adults dictated stories to their children about the family origins, and children helped their parents and grandparents learn to use the computer. Together, the collective effort of these families resulted in family web pages that have been visited by immigrants around the country.

4. *Learning communities are fostered both among learners and among practitioners.*

In the rush to teach parenting skills, the fact that most immigrant adults come from communities that have been parenting effectively for centuries is sometimes forgotten. Some traditional ways of doing things may continue to work, while other strategies may not work or may be inappropriate in a new setting. While information about American laws and belief systems are invaluable for newcomers, the experiences and guidance of others who already have managed this transition may be the most powerful and helpful source of information about strategies for living through changing circumstances. Learners themselves are often the best resource for solving problems. Effective programs provide opportunities for adults to articulate their concerns, compare their experiences, and work collectively to reflect or act on challenges they are facing.

Practitioners can also benefit from the support of colleagues with whom they can articulate their vision and solve problems. Opportunities to reflect regularly with colleagues create the context for programs and teaching practices to evolve as more is understood about learners. Collaboration with others who have different kinds of knowledge or expertise is also important. Child and adult educators, as well as ethnic leaders or immigrant advocates are natural partners who can learn from one another, stretching their vision through dialogue. These partnerships create the best hope for creating programs that take into account the larger context in which families are struggling, as well as the best approaches to teaching and learning.

Conclusion

There are many sources of inspiration for innovative work in family and intergenerational literacy that can make a difference. With movement in the directions outlined above, it becomes possible to imagine schools that understand and respond to families and communities; families that cooperate with schools toward agreed-upon goals; and generations who find in one another the resources to remember their past, to manage the present, and to take on the future with confidence and joy.

References

Ada, A.F. (1988). The Pajaro Valley experience: Working with Spanish-speaking parents to develop children's reading and writing skills in the home through the use of children's literature. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas and J.Cummins (Eds.), *Minority education: From shame to struggle* (pp. 223-238). Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

Agard, A. (in press). For the children: Remembering Mien life in Laos. In G. Weinstein (Ed.), *Learners' lives as curriculum: Six journeys to immigrant literacy: Report to the Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund.*

Auerbach, E.R. (1992). *Making meaning, making change*. Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems. (Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270)

Bercovitz, L., & Porter, C. (1995). *Parents as educational partners: A school related curriculum for language minority parents*. Des Plaines, IL: Adult Learning Resource Center.

Brizius, J.A. & Foster, S.A. (1993). *Generation to generation: Realizing the promise of family literacy*. Ypsillanti, MI: High Scope Press. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 357 869)

Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language develoment in promoting educational success for language minority students. In J. Cummins (Ed.), *School and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3-50). Los Angeles: California State University.

Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1987). Mexican adult literacy: New directions for immigrants. In S.R. Goldman & H. Trueba (Eds.), *Becoming literate in English as a second language* (pp. 9-32). Norwood, NY: Ablex. (EDRS No. ED 399 787)

Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs. (1997). *Family and child education (FACE)*. Washington, DC: Author.

Doorn, D. (1995). Family collaboration in children's literacy: When journals travel home. In G. Weinstein and E. Quintero, *Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect the generations* (pp. 43-58). Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems. (Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270)

Gadsden, V. (1992). Giving meaning to literacy: Intergenerational beliefs about access. *Theory into practice, 31*, 328-336.

Hartman, C. (in press). Memories of Chinese festivals. In Weinstein, G. (Ed.), *Learners' lives as curriculum: Six journeys to immigrant literacy: Report to the Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund.*

Holt, D. (Ed). (1993). *Assessing success in family literacy projects*. Washington DC & McHenry, Il: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems. (Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270)

Hornberger, N. (1996). Mother-tongue literacy in the Cambodian community of Philadelphia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 119*, 69-86.

Hovanesian, S. (in press). Building communities through families: Family literacy page and quilt project. In G. Weinstein (Ed.), *Learners' lives as curriculum: Six journeys to immigrant literacy: Report to the Lila Wallace Readers' Digest Fund.*

McCaleb, S. (1994). *Building communities of learners: A collaboration among teachers, students, families, and community*. NY: St. Martin's Press. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 397 001)

McGrail, L. (1995). Memories of Mami in the family literacy class. In G. Weinstein-Shr and E. Quintero, *Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect the generations* (pp. 77-90). Washington, DC & McHenry, IL.: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems. (Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270)

McLaughlin, D. (1992). *When literacy empowers: Navajo language in print*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Moll, L. (1992). Bilingual classroom studies and community analyses: Some recent trends. *Educational Researcher, 21*, 20-24.

National Center for Family Literacy. (1997). *Brief: Welfare reform*. Louisville, KY: Author.

Nelson, C. (1998, Spring). Family learning in workplace education: A union makes it happen. *Bright Ideas, 7*(4), 19-20.

Nickse, R. (1990). Foreword. In McIvor, (Ed). *Family literacy in action: A survey of successful programs* (pp. i-iii). NY: New Readers Press.

Peyton, J.K. & Crandall, J. (1995). *Philosophies and approaches in adult ESL instruction*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

Simich-Dudgeon, C. (1986). *Parent involvement and the education of limited-English proficient students*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED279 205)

Stein, S. (1997). *Equipped for the Future: A reform agenda for adult literacy and lifelong learning*. DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Sticht, T.G., & B.A. McDonald. (1989). *Making the nation smarter: The intergenerational transfer of cognitive ability*. San Diego, CA: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 309 279)

Street, J.C., & Street, B.V. (1991). The schooling of literacy. In D. Barton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Writing in the community* (pp. 143-166). London: Sage.

Taylor, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Many families, many literacies*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Teale, W. H. (1982). Reading to young children: Its significance for literacy development. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg, & F. Smith (Eds.), *Awakening to literacy* (110-121). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 248 283)

Tizard, J., Schofield, W., & Hewison, J. (1982). Symposium: Reading collaboration between teachers and parents in assisting children's reading. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52*, (1-15).

Weinstein, G. (1997). From problem-solving to celebration: Discovering and creating meanings through literacy. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 54* (1), 28-47. (Reprinted from *TESL Talk 20*(1), pp. 68-88. 1990)

Weinstein-Shr, G. (1993). *Growing old in America: Learning English literacy in the later years*. ERIC Digest. Washington DC: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.

Weinstein-Shr, G. (1995). Learning from uprooted families. In G. Weinstein-Shr and E. Quintero (Eds.), *Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect the generations* (pp. 113-135). Washington, DC & McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems. (Available from Delta Systems at 1-800-323-8270)

Weinstein-Shr, G., & J. Huizenga, (1996). *Collaborations: Our languages, our lives*. Adult ESL textbook series. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, Inc.

ERIC/NCLE Digests are available free of charge from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE), 1118 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC 20037; (202) 429-9292, ext. 200; e-mail: ncle@cal.org. World Wide Web: www.cal.org/ncle. ERIC/NCLE Digests can be dounloaded from the World Wide Web at www.cal.org/ncle.

Citations with an ED number may be purchased from the **ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS)** at 1-800-443-3742. (E-mail: service@edrs.com)

The National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) is operated by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education, under contract no. RR 93002010. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED. This document is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission.

Visit NCLE on the World Wide Web at www.cal.org/ncle.